

Belonging, Courage and Love: Living the Pāramīs

A Ten-Month Journey with Booker — Learning the Heart Qualities of Freedom

Course Overview

Belonging, Courage and Love is a ten-month immersion in the *pāramīs*—the ten heart qualities the Buddha cultivated over countless lifetimes to prepare for awakening.

Before he became the Buddha, he was a *bodhisattva* devoted to perfecting generosity, patience, truthfulness, and lovingkindness. These were not abstract ideals, but living practices—ways of being in relationship with a complex world.

Guided by **Booker**—a Black, queer Dharma teacher and lover of liberation whose work bridges wisdom and justice—this program invites you to walk that same human path. Through embodied practice, storytelling, reflection, and community connection, you'll learn to bring the *pāramīs* to life in your everyday experience—at work, in relationships, and in moments of challenge or joy.

What Are the Pāramīs—and Why Do They Matter?

If you've practiced mindfulness, you already know its value—the ability to pause, breathe, and meet each moment with presence.

But awareness alone isn't enough.

The Buddha understood that to truly live with wisdom and compassion, awareness must be supported by *qualities of heart* that sustain us through difficulty and guide our actions in the world.

These qualities are called the **Pāramīs**—the ten “perfections” or *beautiful virtues of the awakened heart*.

A Path of Wholeness

The word *pāramī* comes from the root meaning “to cross over”—suggesting qualities that help us cross the river of confusion and fear into freedom.

They’re not about becoming perfect.

They’re about **remembering our innate capacity for goodness** and cultivating it moment by moment.

In the traditional teachings, the ten *pāramīs* are:

1. **Generosity (Dāna)** – the joy of giving
2. **Ethics (Sīla)** – living in harmony with others
3. **Renunciation (Nekkhamma)** – letting go for the sake of peace
4. **Wisdom (Paññā)** – seeing clearly
5. **Energy (Viriya)** – showing up with courage
6. **Patience (Khanti)** – staying steady through change
7. **Truthfulness (Sacca)** – living from what’s real
8. **Resolve (Adhiṭṭhāna)** – aligning intention and action
9. **Lovingkindness (Mettā)** – the boundless heart
10. **Equanimity (Upekkhā)** – balance amidst life’s storms

“The Eightfold Path shows *how* to walk toward awakening.
The *Pāramīs* reveal *who you become* along the way.” — **Booker**

Why They Matter Now

In modern mindfulness, we often focus on *how to pay attention*.

The pāramīs are inviting us to ask: what kind of heart am I moving through the world with?

They remind us that practice isn’t only about calm or insight; it’s about becoming a more generous, truthful, and loving human being. They bring mindfulness off the cushion and into our relationships, communities, and work.

When the pāramīs mature, mindfulness becomes more than a tool for stress relief. It becomes a path of **ethical presence**, **relational healing**, and **collective liberation**—the awakening of the heart, not just the mind.

“It’s not about meditating your way out of life—it’s about being fully alive.” — **Booker**

Belonging as Collective Freedom

The heart of this program is belonging.

Booker teaches that liberation isn’t solitary—it’s shared.

Each pāramī becomes a bridge between inner work and outer care.

As we practice generosity, patience, and truthfulness, we remember that freedom is relational:

what we cultivate in ourselves ripples outward, touching the collective.

Belonging and liberation rise together.

How We’ll Practice

Each month, we’ll move between stillness and engagement—through meditation, journaling, storytelling, and small-group reflection.

You’ll explore the pāramīs not as ideas to memorize but as **practices to embody**—testing them in the real flow of life. Between sessions, guided reflections and Sangha circles help you stay connected, supported, and real.

This is not about self-improvement; it’s about *self-trust*.

It’s about remembering what’s already whole within you.

Learning Goals

By the end of this journey, you will:

- Understand the ten pāramīs as a living map of the Buddha’s human journey toward awakening.

- Develop each pāramī as an embodied relational practice—not just a concept.
 - Learn to meet challenge, loss, and joy with steadiness and compassion.
 - Cultivate self-trust, ethical clarity, and grounded confidence.
 - Bring mindfulness off the cushion and into daily life and community.
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Course Structure

Length: 10 months

Format: Monthly teachings, guided meditations, somatic practices, journaling, and community wisdom democracy.

Each month includes:

- Live teaching session with Booker
 - Guided meditation with an emphasis on listening to the body
 - Reflection prompts and small-group dialogue
 - Monthly wisdom democracy session
 - Optional Sangha circles for deeper exploration
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Module-by-Module Journey

1. DĀNA – Generosity: Opening the Hand of the Heart

Generosity as an act of trust, not transaction.

Practice: Offer presence, time, or care where you usually withhold.

Outcome: Experience giving as freedom from fear and isolation.

2. SĪLA – Ethics: Living in Alignment

Integrity as care, not rule-following.

Practice: Choose one domain—speech, consumption, or relationship—and live it more truthfully.

Outcome: Feel how integrity grounds and regulates the heart.

3. NEKKHAMMA – Renunciation: The Joy of Enough

Letting go is not loss—it's liberation.

Practice: Release one habit or attachment that no longer serves your peace.

Outcome: Feel the spaciousness that comes from simplicity.

4. PAÑÑĀ – Wisdom: Seeing Clearly

Wisdom arises from curiosity and humility.

Practice: Notice how reactivity clouds clarity; pause before interpreting.

Outcome: Let insight emerge through listening, not effort.

5. VIRIYA – Energy: The Art of Showing Up

Effort that's balanced, joyful, and sustainable.

Practice: Identify one area where you can persevere with kindness instead of force.

Outcome: Develop vitality rooted in purpose, not striving.

6. KHANTI – Patience: The Strength of Spaciousness

Patience as radical compassion with time.

Practice: When impatience arises, breathe space into the moment.

Outcome: Learn to stay present through difficulty without collapse.

7. SACCA – Truthfulness: Living from What's Real

Honesty as liberation.

Practice: Speak one uncomfortable truth with love.

Outcome: Experience integrity as wholeness—the alignment of word, body, and heart.

8. ADHIṬṬHĀNA – Resolve: Commitment Guided by Love

Steadfastness without rigidity.

Practice: Name one vow of the heart and live it daily.

Outcome: Cultivate unshakable clarity grounded in care.

9. METTĀ – Lovingkindness: The Boundless Heart

Love as radical belonging.

Practice: Extend kindness to someone difficult.

Outcome: Transform protection into connection.

10. UPEKKHĀ – Equanimity: Balance Amid Change

Equanimity as love that has learned balance.

Practice: Notice when clinging or aversion pulls you off-center; return to breath.

Outcome: Care deeply without control—rest in the middle of life’s flow.

Closing Retreat: Integration & Celebration

Revisit all ten pāramīs as one integrated whole.

Share stories of transformation, reflect on growth, and celebrate the journey.

Leave with a personal practice plan—and a felt sense of belonging and liberation.

Booker’s Teaching Philosophy

Booker’s teaching is born from lived experience—as a Black, queer woman, activist, and Dharma teacher who has worked in prisons, with people living with HIV/AIDS, and in communities on the margins.

Her teaching is embodied, relational, and real. She speaks “**kitchen-table Dharma**”—accessible, inclusive, and alive.

She draws equally from Buddhist scripture and voices of Black feminist liberation and humor, blending the wisdom of interdependence, disability justice, and mutual care.

“You can’t meditate your way out of a bad relationship.
You have to live the practice where it matters most.” — **Booker**

She calls herself an *anti-meditation meditation teacher* because her focus is not on perfect stillness but on being vibrantly human. Her students describe her teaching as *freedom made practical*.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the program, you will be able to:

1. Demonstrate how the pāramīs can guide real-life decisions and relationships.
 2. Practice meeting conditioning with compassion and truth in real time.
 3. Integrate the pāramīs as daily, embodied virtues.
 4. Cultivate compassion and courage in your personal and social life.
 5. Experience generosity, integrity, and balance as embodied freedom.
 6. Belong more deeply—to yourself, to community, and to the world.
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Course Elements

- **Teachings & Guided Practices**
- **Community Q&A**
- **Embodiment Sessions** (support in cultivating a more intimate relationship with the wisdom of your body)

- **Story & Reflection** (Booker's lived examples—divorce, activism, resilience)
 - **Sangha Circles** for small-group connection
 - **Integration Toolkit** with readings, poetry, and journaling prompts
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Course Promise

This isn't a course about Buddhism—it's a course about being human.

You'll learn to move through the world with clarity, generosity, and courage—awake not only in meditation, but in conversation, conflict, and love.

"The pāramīs help us treat others the way we wish to be treated—they make us trustworthy to ourselves." — **Booker**

About Booker

Booker brings two decades of teaching Dharma through the lens of love, justice, and embodiment.

Her work bridges ancient wisdom and modern life—reaching everyone from activists to corporate leaders to those rebuilding life after loss.

She is known for her ability to make the profound feel practical, to hold humor alongside heartbreak, and to help people rediscover the beauty of being human.

Contact us: courses@spiritrock.org